

- 2 -

In the claims:

All of the claims standing for examination are reproduced below with appropriate status indications.

1. (Currently amended) A stopper assembly for sealing an opening of a vessel comprising:

a screw stem body having a tapered head on one end and a threaded portion on the other end;

an elastic enclosure fitted over a portion at least half the length of the screw stem body including the tapered head, such that the screw stem body is separated by the elastic enclosure from any contents of the vessel to be sealed;

a retention housing fitted to the elastic enclosure at the end opposite the tapered head, the retention housing retaining the enclosure from lateral displacement, and having a central opening through which the threaded extension passes; and

a turning nut attached to the retention housing and threaded to the extension of the screw stem body on a side opposite the elastic enclosure;

characterized in that a user inserts the stopper assembly into a vessel opening, holds the retention housing stable, and turns the turning nut causing travel of the screw stem body through the retention housing within the elastic enclosure and deformation of the elastic enclosure by the tapered head, deformation thereof directed radially outward to make peripheral contact with an inner surface of the opening thereby sealing the opening.

2. (Previously presented) The assembly of claim 1 wherein the elastic enclosure comprises a rubber sleeve having a flared end and deformation occurs when the tapered surface of the tapered head within the sleeve is forced against the flared portion of the sleeve.

3. (Previously presented) The assembly of claim 1 wherein the elastic enclosure is a

- 3 -

rubber socket covering the tapered head, the socket having a formed feature of peripheral orientation in the socket wall and deformation occurs when the tapered surface of the tapered head is forced against the formed feature of the socket.

4. (Previously presented) The assembly of claim 1 wherein the retention housing is keyed to the threaded portion of the screw stem body using a key held in a key opening on the housing, the key engaging a key slot in the body to prevent rotation of the housing about the body.

5. (Previously presented) The assembly of claim 1 wherein the retention housing includes a retention cap and a gripping cup, the cup gripping the inner surface of the retention cap to prevent inter-rotation of the components.

6. (Previously presented) The assembly of claim 2 further comprising:
a gas passageway extending longitudinally through the screw stem body;
a second threaded portion on the body; and
a valve stem assembly threaded onto the second threaded portion;
characterized in that gas is inserted into the vessel by way of the valve stem assembly and passageway through the sealed opening to maintain carbonation of liquid held in the vessel.

7. (Previously presented) The assembly of claim 2 wherein the retention housing is keyed to the threaded portion of the screw stem body using a key engaging a key slot in the body to prevent rotation of the housing about the body.

8. (Original) The assembly of claim 2 wherein the retention housing includes a retention cap and a gripping cup the cup gripping the inner surface of the retention cap to prevent inter-rotation of the components.

- 4 -

9. (Currently amended) A method for sealing a vessel opening using a stopper assembly having a threaded screw stem body with a tapered head on one end and a threaded portion on the other end; an elastic enclosure fitted over at least half the length ~~a portion of the~~ screw stem body including the tapered head, such that the screw stem body is separated by the elastic enclosure from any contents of the vessel to be sealed; a retention housing fitted to the elastic enclosure at an end opposite the tapered head; and a turning nut attached to the retention housing and threaded to the extension of the screw stem body comprising steps of:

- (a) positioning the stopper assembly into the vessel opening;
- (b) holding the retention housing to stabilize body travel there through; and
- (c) turning the turning nut until the opening is sealed.

10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 9 wherein the elastic enclosure is one of a rubber sleeve or a rubber socket.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 9 wherein in step (a) the vessel opening is void of threading or lip features.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 9 wherein in step (b) the retention housing retains the elastic enclosure and functions as a travel bed for the threaded body portion.

13. (Canceled)